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Indonesian EFL Curricula: What content knowledge demands do they make of Australian teachers?

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Abstract

This paper reports on the experiences of four Australian teachers who provide English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction to Indonesian secondary school students in a regional area of Central Java, Indonesia. These four teachers were all native English speakers and experienced qualified teachers, however, the Australian State Department of Education that sent them to Indonesia did not provide them with formal EFL teaching qualifications or experience. This paper theorises the teachers' talk about their teaching work in Indonesia in an attempt to identify the forms of content knowledge they required to do their teaching. Two significant findings emerged from this research. Firstly, the teachers encountered two distinctively different EFL curricula in Indonesia: the formal EFL Indonesian National Secondary School curriculum and an informal EFL curriculum that the teachers introduced. Each of these curricula required the teachers to draw upon a different content knowledge base. The second significant finding was that these unqualified and inexperienced EFL teachers were not able to make an effective contribution to the formal EFL Indonesian National Secondary School curriculum because they were not given an opportunity to acquire the requisite content knowledge base. Such findings should be of interest to teachers and program managers involved in EFL curricula.

Introduction

Significant changes in the structure of the world's economic, political, social and cultural systems have taken place both at the global and local levels in what Hall (1996) defines as 'New Times'. He has identified seven characteristics of these new times: the shift from manufacturing and industrial technologies to new information communication technologies; a more flexible, specialised, decentralized labour process and work organization and growth of the computer based, hi-tech industries; the outsourcing of functions and services that were until now provided in-house; the leading role of consumption with the 'targeting' of consumers by lifestyle, taste and culture rather than by social class; a decline in the proportion of the skilled, male, manual working class and the corresponding rise in a more feminised and ethnically diversified service sector and professional classes; an economy dominated by multinational companies; and a globalisation of the new financial markets (Hall, p. 224-225). Hall (1996) and others, such as Castells (1996, 1997, 1998, 2000) and Burbules and Torres (2000), claim that such changes have resulted in demand for new skills, particularly in industries related to technology, economics, science, health and entertainment. Underpinning these new skills has also been a burgeoning demand for training and studies in English. Despite its colonial origins and those who view it with much suspicion (Phillipson, 1993;

Crystal, 1997, 1998), competence in English has been increasingly sought by Asian elites because of its position as the global lingua franca of disciplines of knowledge such as economics, science, technology, medicine and business communication.

Providing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has been a major industry for Australian education providers, especially since the Federal Government encouraged the development of offshore education (Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, 1993; Baker, 1996; DETYA, 2001). Australian teachers thus became more heavily involved in delivering a range of offshore educational programs. Presently, offshore programs are delivered to students in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and China. The success of the programs provided to Indonesia are of significant interest to Australia, given that Indonesia is Australia's closest neighbour and that there have been periods of marked tension between the two nation-states (see Rizvi, 1997; Mackie, 2000). In addition, more than thirty formal educational agreements are either in place or are being negotiated between Australia and Indonesia (Jolley, 1997). However, Australian educational providers are not automatically guaranteed access to these highly sought after markets. There is heavy competition from educational institutions from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Singapore, Germany, the Netherlands and other countries within the South-East Asian region (Cannon, 1997; Singh, Kell & Pandian, 2002). If Australian educational providers want to maintain these markets, and all the associated social, trade and military benefits that go along with them (Andressen, 1997), then it is timely to investigate what content knowledge demands Indonesian EFL programs make of teachers who provide instruction within these programs.

This paper is organised in five sections. The first section introduces a specific case study of four Australian teachers who were not qualified or experienced EFL teachers but were required to provide EFL instruction in Indonesia. This case study generated data by employing semi-structured interviews with the four Australian teachers who provided EFL instruction to Indonesian secondary school students in a regional area of Central Java. This data showed that the teachers spoke about two distinctively different EFL curricula in Indonesia: the State mandated Indonesian National English curriculum, and the informal EFL curriculum. The second and third sections present the teachers' talk about each of these EFL curricula. Following this, the fourth section introduces a theorisation of teachers' content knowledge that can be employed to analyse the teachers' talk about their professional experiences. Finally, this paper discusses the findings and associated implications of this study for those involved in the provision of EFL education in New Times.

Case Study: Four Australian Teachers Who Provide EFL Instruction to Indonesian Secondary School Students in Central Java, Indonesia

This paper draws on semi-structured interviews with four Australian teachers. At the time of data collection, all four teachers were employed by an Australian State Department of Education, and through an Australian State Department of Trade initiative became guest teachers in Purwodani, a pseudonym for a regional area of Central Java, Indonesia. They were guest teachers in Purwodani for approximately ten months. The four Australian guest teachers were all qualified and experienced teachers. According to an interview with a manager from the Australian-based education department, these four teachers were selected to participate in this guest teacher program because they 'demonstrated flexibility, demonstrated that they might survive in an offshore environment', and 'were likely to come back and use

their expertise in the interests of the organisation'. For the purposes of this study, the four guest teachers have been given the pseudonyms Dennis Bertram, Paulina Andrews, Regan Arden and Rosalind Page. Details about each of the guest teachers is provided below:

- **Dennis Bertram** was a qualified teacher who majored in Indonesian history at university. He began his teaching career in the 1980s and taught English curriculum and humanities to native English speaking secondary school students in Australia and on a previous exchange to an English speaking country. He had no English as a Second Language (ESL) or EFL qualifications or teaching experience. Dennis had lived in two South-East Asian countries other than Indonesia for periods of time.
- **Pauline Andrews** was a qualified teacher who also began her teaching career in the 1980s. She was a primary school curriculum coordinator who had been on numerous trips to Asia. She had commenced her Certificate in Applied Linguistics at a local training institution but was not formally qualified or experienced with teaching ESL or EFL. She had some proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia, the national Indonesian language.
- **Regan Arden** was a qualified teacher who taught Art, History and Manual Arts to secondary school students in Australia. He also started teaching in the 1980s and has since undertaken a one year teaching exchange in another English speaking country and another three years in the Middle East. He studied Asian Studies at the Masters Level and Language studies at a language institute. Regan had graduated with an ESL certificate but had no experience teaching ESL or EFL classes. He had traveled to Asia on numerous occasions, as a tourist and as an education guide with groups of school students.
- **Rosalind Page** was a qualified teacher who began her teaching career in the 1970s. She has since been awarded a Graduate Diploma of Asian Languages (Indonesia) and was working as a primary school music specialist and Indonesian language teacher. She did not have any ESL or EFL qualifications or experience. She had traveled to Indonesia on many previous occasions.

The four teachers were interviewed in Australia before their departure to Indonesia and then again three weeks after their arrival in Purwodani. The guest teachers were interviewed again on their immediate return from Indonesia and once more after six months had elapsed. In short, this paper draws on interview talk with four Australian teachers who each participated in four semi-structured interviews over the course of sixteen months. By way of example, the interview questions that were used to generate teachers' talk about their EFL work in Indonesia were:

- What are your aims for your Indonesian students?
- What are the anticipated outcomes of your lessons?
- What skills do you expect to teach?
- How do you organise your content?

Even though none of the four guest teachers were EFL qualified or experienced, it was common practice for the Australian State Department of Education who was responsible for coordinating the program to only provide a short orientation program. These four guest teachers each confirmed in their own way that they had been involved in a program that consisted of 'a couple of days talking to a resource teacher about things to expect, things not to expect, cultural information, handy hints, what to take, what not to take, teaching resources and what sort of gifts and Australian souvenirs' they might take abroad with them (fieldnotes). These teachers confirmed that the orientation program did not provide them with specific guidelines for curriculum, teaching or evaluation procedures. One of the guest teachers spoke for the group in stating that they were given 'little knowledge about the local

education system, the local political system, the cultures and religions of the area, local teaching and learning styles and the role and status of English' (fieldnotes).

Whilst in Indonesia, these teachers were required to teach EFL to Indonesian secondary school students. The students, selected on the basis of academic merit, attended select government schools in Purwodani and studied English as part of their secondary school academic course. There was general agreement about the intellect and of the assiduousness of the students. Throughout the course of sixteen semi-structured interviews, on only one occasion did one guest teacher make mention of a single student who had in some way failed to apply themselves to their studies. One of the guest teachers described how the students were being 'preened to become the future leaders of the army, politicians and heads of business'. These students, on average, had little or no contact with Westerners and were learning English for instrumental reasons such as using it as a lingua franca or to access English texts. The Purwodani-based secondary schools that they attended were considered to be 'true' EFL programs in that the context of instruction was not an English speaking context. According to the four guest teachers, English instruction provided by Indonesian National teachers was delivered in a mix of Bahasa Indonesia, Javanese and English, depending upon the Indonesian National teacher's linguistic preferences.

This section of the paper has raised two significant points: the four Australian guest teachers were not qualified and experienced EFL teachers; and the orientation program in which they participated did not prescribe what or how they would do their teaching. The next two sections present the teachers' talk that relates to the content knowledge demands of the two EFL curricula. The guest teachers confirmed that they were required to teach two EFL curricula: the State mandated Indonesian National English curriculum, and an informal EFL curriculum. The teachers' talk about each of the curricula will be dealt with in turn.

Teachers' Talk About the Mandated Indonesian National English Curriculum

In their pre-departure interviews conducted during their Australian based orientation program, the four Australian guest teachers said that they had been told that the Indonesian National English curriculum was a grammar-based curriculum. However, once in Purwodani, they found out that a new Indonesian National English curriculum had been implemented. This new curriculum was broader than a mere grammar approach. Dennis described it as 'active communicative English'. In speaking about the content of the new Indonesian National English curriculum, Rosalind said that her contact teacher referred to it as 'Javanese English' and described it as 'different from American English and Australian English'. Rosalind explained that sometimes the structure of an English sentence was an Indonesian structure. All of the guest teachers spoke about the need for the Indonesian National English teachers to get their students to the end of the year where they would do their final English proficiency exam. Rosalind explained how all the teachers still had to follow the themes and the topics because 'that's the content on which the students would be examined'. Expressing her own opinion, she said: 'I think it was externally exam-driven really so to be sure that those students covered everything, they went through all the work in their books'. Paulina concurred with Rosalind's comments and added that the Indonesian English teachers were limited by the set text they were using. Paulina explained that the curriculum was the textbook, and there were certain topics each class had to cover. She said that clusters of schools 'would devise the text book', then clarified: 'The topics were the same but not all the materials were the same. For example, Rosalind, who was in a different [cluster], would be doing the same topics but with different material, different pieces of text for comprehension'.

Regan, who said that in the December he was taken off his teaching duties with the third years 'because they were going to have their big external exams in June', confirmed such assertions. Although he said that his Head of Department would not have put it like this, his candid interpretation of the decision was that he may have been seen 'to be wasting the students' time'.

In her second interview conducted in Purwodani, Paulina responded to an interviewer's question about the content of the lessons from the mandated Indonesian National English curriculum. Her response was typical of the talk from the other three guest teachers:

Extract One

Interviewer: *So, what is it you are actually teaching?*

Paulina: *When I asked about curriculum and what they wanted me to do I was initially given their activity book for Class 3. This activity book consisted of text, comprehensions, related activities, mostly written, very little oral. The text contained in the activity book was quite in-depth, the content is difficult. So much so that it's taught under topics. For example, science and technology, economics and so forth. I've taught in both or done lessons out of both of those and I felt at stages that I wasn't teaching English. I was teaching science and technology or I was teaching economics, trying to explain about capitalistic societies and communistic economies and so forth, but to try and explain those in English was very difficult, and I suddenly realised this is an economics lesson or in science and technology one of the topics was tomography. Now I had to go and find out what tomography was myself before I could (laughing) [teach]*

Interviewer: *Could you give me a hint?*

Paulina: *It was talking about medical diagnosis using these machines.*

The main focus of this extract is on Paulina's statement where she said that she 'felt at stages that she wasn't teaching English'. Although she doesn't clarify what she thought English teaching should include, she explained that she felt that she was in fact 'teaching science, technology and economics'. These statements are significant for they suggest the Indonesian National EFL curriculum primarily uses English as a medium of instruction for teaching scientific, technological and economic knowledge.

However, by their third interview, conducted in Australia on their return from Indonesia, the guest teachers reported that they did not do much of the teaching from the mandated curriculum. All four guest teachers reported that they were encouraged to work outside of this curriculum and provide a supplementary informal EFL curriculum. The next section will draw out the key points that the four guest teachers made in relation to this curriculum.

Teachers' Talk About the Informal EFL Curriculum

In their talk about the informal EFL curriculum, all four guest teachers said that they were encouraged by Heads of Schools and Heads of Department to 'do their own thing'. Regan said that his school was not even worried if he followed the formal Indonesian National EFL curriculum. In response to a researcher's question about what he taught, he provided the following detail:

Extract Two

Regan: ...It's just like, get them talking. And I try to bring in some of the phrases that are in the syllabus and I try to do a little bit of science and technology language, but that's not really important to them.

This extract from Regan suggests that the guest teachers were encouraged to downplay the 'English as medium of instruction for scientific, technological and economic knowledge' focus of the formal Indonesian EFL curriculum. Regan's viewpoint was supported by the other guest teachers. For example, Dennis said that his Head of Department realised that active communicative English was really important. Rosalind's Principal wanted the students to be enthused and to have their language activated. In other words, the guest teachers were legitimised in validating other forms of content knowledge.

The guest teachers were keen to veer from the mandated curriculum for their own reasons. Dennis said that he had a preference for leaving the textbook to the Indonesian teachers and that he wanted to develop the oral side of their language. Regan and Dennis were frustrated by the plethora of grammatical and spelling mistakes in the mandated curriculum and the texts. In Extract Three, below, Regan gave the following justification:

Extract Three

Regan: One word I picked out and it was 'deny', to disagree with. And we had to talk about where you would use 'deny' because the example in the textbook would be, 'That's a red dress you're wearing. I deny that'. And you wouldn't use it in that context.

This extract from Regan is important for the way that it highlights his awareness that the formal Indonesian EFL curriculum does not follow what could be called Standard Australian English (SAE). It seems that Regan spent time 'repairing' the Javanese English instruction provided in the textbook.

Paulina was concerned with the possible mismatch between the English language competencies of the students and the demands of the text. In her second interview, the one conducted in Purwodani, she responded to an interviewer's question about what knowledge she transmitted in her lessons:

Extract Four

Paulina: It was talking about medical diagnosis using these machines and so forth which is fine in terms of the content perhaps being related to the level of the students in those subject areas but not for English. I really felt, and I've come to this conclusion after the three weeks is that the text needs to be simplified. They can still be under the same topics which they seem to want, but they need to simplify the text.

Interviewer: What do you understand is the reasoning behind that approach?

Paulina: I think they're trying to give them English, English usage in a variety of subject and topic areas. Which is, I think that's fine, perhaps there is no one who can create a simplified text, so they've just taken a hunk out of an economics book

Interviewer: An English economics book?

Paulina: Yes, or taken a hunk out of a research article for science and technology, not considering the concepts and the language and terminology is going to be very difficult in itself, without having to worry about the English practice.

Paulina's extract highlights her belief that EFL instruction should include 'the concepts of the language, terminology and English practice'.

Without exception, the guest teachers selected and transmitted a broader range of knowledges than legitimised by the official mandated Indonesian curriculum. One form of content knowledge that all four teachers said that they developed centred on ‘punctuation and the frequently occurring error patterns in the students’ speech and writing’. For example, Dennis wanted to instil confidence in the students with their English language, and ‘get some of them to actually create, adapt and repair their English language, have fun and enjoy it’.

Yet, on other occasions, the four guest teachers said that they introduced other forms of content knowledge. Dennis, Rosalind and Regan provided clear examples. Dennis said that he taught a three week unit on Australian geography, Australian animals, Aborigines, the upcoming Sydney Olympics, everyday aspects of Government (such as who is the Prime Minister), typical housing, foods and religion. He said he tried to give his students an insight into everyday Australian life. Rosalind said that in the introductory section her students wanted to know about Aboriginal people and their art. She explained:

Extract Five

Rosalind: *Well I told them about the little bit that I knew...A bit about dance, about the languages that they spoke, about how they fitted into society, whether they went to school and so on and I did mention a little bit about the problems and reconciliation and bits and pieces of questions. I didn’t ever really do a lesson although I did one lesson [with Regan’s help]. We had a picture and we talked about the relationship of the people to the land.*

Regan said that he talked to his students about schools and tourist areas in Australia and taught them the words to some Savage Garden songs and “Hero” by Mariah Carey. He explained that when the students interviewed him he said that he liked Mariah Carey and they all ‘whooped and hollered’, so he thought, ‘Okay, good. I like her and the song ‘Hero’ is slow and easy’.

Throughout their interview talk, all four guest teachers contrasted the content of the Indonesian mandated EFL curriculum with the content of the informal EFL curriculum. However, this talk from the guest teachers comprised only the raw data. These data had to be analysed and theorised so those findings pertaining to teachers’ content knowledge base could be reported. The next section of this paper introduces the theoretical and analytical framework capable of undertaking this task.

Theorising the Content Knowledge Demands of EFL Curricula

Bernstein’s (1996, 2000) work on the organising principles of intellectual fields provided a useful way to describe the content knowledge teachers needed to provide instruction in various curricula. Bernstein explained how intellectual fields could be separated into three forms of knowledge: knowledge of everyday skills; specialised knowledge of general propositions; and specialised knowledge of specific disciplinary subjects. **Knowledge of everyday skills** tended to be ritualistic, highly predictable and something that did not necessarily require much explicit instruction, such as singing a pop song in English. **Specialised knowledge of general propositions** evolved out of very general propositions and theories, such as learning general English speaking competencies to read, for example, a local English newspaper or to travel as a tourist in an English speaking country. **Specialised knowledge of specific disciplinary subjects** was considered to be part of a collection of knowledge that was characterised by esoteric discourses. Examples of this would be the

English language competencies needed to engage in international trade agreements or political discussions.

However, the teachers' implicit dialogue about the knowledge bases required to teach each of the curricula needed to be made explicit. Put another way, the teachers' talk about their professional experiences had to be translated into theorisations about the content knowledge demands of an EFL curriculum. This means that the specificities of the context must be de-emphasised (although never ignored) to provide general understandings about the content knowledge base demands of EFL curricula. To this end, analytic questions, derived from the theoretical framework, above, had to be asked of the data. Analytic questions used for this part of the study were:

- What do the teachers say about the rituals in their programs of instruction?
- What do the teachers say about the relationship between the context and the content in their programs of instruction?
- What do the teachers say about any specialised skills in their programs of instruction?
- What do the teachers say about specialised languages in their programs of instruction?

The answers to these analytic questions produced the research findings. The findings, and discussion pertaining to these findings, will be presented in the next section.

The Findings and Discussion

It will be recalled that the teachers' talk showed that there existed clear cut differences between the content knowledge mandated by the Indonesian National English language curriculum and the supplementary content knowledge that the guest teachers brought into the curriculum. According to the teachers' talk, the Indonesian mandated curriculum focused on the languages of science, technology and economics. In theoretical terms, teachers who provided the instruction needed to have **specialised knowledge of specific disciplinary subjects**. The teachers' talk suggested that they were not able to effectively contribute to this curriculum because they were not provided with the specialised knowledge of specific disciplinary subject. In some cases, Heads of Department and School Principals recognised the guest teachers' lack of requisite specialised knowledge and withdrew the guest teachers from classes who were preparing for their exams. In contrast, the data showed that the supplementary content that the Heads of Department and school Principals encouraged the guest teachers to bring in focused on more general aspects of English language communication and on everyday life in Australia. In these circumstances, the content knowledges that the teachers drew on were **knowledge of everyday skills** and **specialised knowledge of general propositions**. The teachers' talk suggests that they were more confident with their knowledge of everyday skills and specialised knowledge of general propositions.

Although this research has been limited to semi-structured interview data collected from four Australian teachers who provided EFL instruction in one regional area of Central Java, this analysis points to a significant finding: teachers who provide EFL instruction must be able to draw upon multiple and complex content knowledge bases that are not necessarily made up of everyday knowledge. The four Australian teachers who provided data for this study were required by the Indonesian National English curriculum to draw upon specialised knowledges of specialised skills. Throughout their time in Purwodani, the four teachers were also asked by the Heads of Department and secondary school Principals to provide instruction that required them to draw upon specialised knowledges of general propositions of English. Such

a finding raises questions about the practice of using teachers who have no particular content area expertise (such as that required to teach science, mathematics or business knowledge) and non-EFL qualifications and experience. Moreover, it suggests that being a native English speaker does not necessarily endow individuals with the requisite content knowledge base for EFL instruction. It seems appropriate for further research work to throw the spotlight on offshore EFL teacher preparation programs for the purpose of finding out more about the content knowledge bases that teachers acquire in such programs.

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